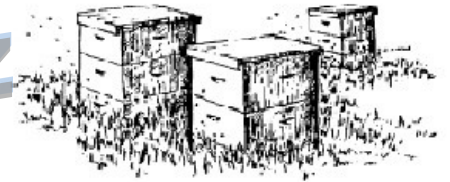




# Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the  
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



February, 2017

The February 14, 2017 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers will be held at 7:00 pm in Fort Bend County's "Bud" O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd., Rosenberg, Texas. Visitors (and new members) are always welcome (membership dues are \$5.00 for the calendar year). The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments while members volunteer to bring snacks, but the volunteer signup sheet disappeared after the January meeting. If you recall volunteering, don't forget to bring salty or sweet treats. The meeting will be called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time. Once again, no one volunteered to give our opening invocation this month. If you can help with this, please see President Nancy Hentschel before the meeting.

## Ask a dozen beekeepers...

Here is this month's Q (from one of our members) and an A:

**Q:** I want to up my game by raising a few queens. Where do I start?

**An A:** It is suggested that you start by considering what you are trying to achieve. It is ok to raise queens just to see if you can, but you should be determined to improve the overall quality in your beeyard as well. Selecting a queen mother is therefore the critical first step. Honey production, vigorous brood rearing and docile nature are considerations, but probably the most important measure is low varroa mite infestation. You should do a "sugar roll" as a measure of the colony mite load before choosing the queen for your queen mother. A "zero" is good, but understand that all of the mites won't fall off in the sugar roll and, more importantly, there may be five or six times as many mites hidden in capped brood. Also, recall that the queen has semen stored from a dozen or more drones, so there is still a bit of a crap shoot there (unless you want to buy an instrumentally inseminated breeder queen for a couple of hundred bucks!).

When raising dozens of queens, you introduce very tiny larvae (less than one day after hatching) into a queenless starter hive. Anxious workers will quickly begin rearing new queens. You place the tiny

larvae in "cell cups" in a "cell cup holder" (pictured in bee supply catalogues). They can be "grafted" by scooping them out of their brood cell using a small spatula-like grafting tool. You need to be sure to get as much royal jelly as you can as you scoop up the worm-like baby bee. Very sharp eyes (or a magnifying lens), adequate lighting and a steady hand are necessary. A damp cloth cover helps prevent the larvae from drying out as you do this delicate work.

When raising queens, the "starter" (queenless) colony may begin with a quite a few larvae, but would soon focus their attention on a much smaller number, maybe as few as two or three. For that reason, the cell cup holder is usually moved into a strong queenright "finisher" colony after about 24 hours in the starter hive. The queenright bees are anxious to raise a number of new queens for future colonies. They can mature dozens of new queens.

As an alternative to separate starter and finisher hives, you can use a device called a "Cloake Board". It incorporates a queen excluder, hive entrance and a removable tray. Before inserting the cell cup holder, you use the tray in between hive bodies to fool half of the hive into thinking that they are queenless. You give them a day to get lots of queen cells started then remove the tray for them to finish the job knowing that they are queenright.

With a Cloake Board, the starter and the finisher is one hive.

As an alternative to grafting, you can use various queen rearing cage systems where you confine the queen so that she lays eggs in cell cup holders. In a day or so you should have 100 or more eggs, so you open the cage to release the queen. In three days the eggs will hatch and workers will feed the tiny larvae. You select the best looking ones to go in your cell cup holder to be introduced to the queenless starter bees. The queen rearing cage systems relieve you of the delicate grafting work (and potential injury to the larvae) and you don't have to worry about using larvae that is too old since you know when the queen was laying.

It takes a total of 15 1/2 days from egg lay to an emerging adult queen. Beware that the first queen to emerge may kill her sisters, so a day or two before emergence is expected, you must prepare an appropriate number of queenless mating nucs. The next morning the ripe queen cells go into the mating nucs. If the new queen successfully emerges and survives her mating flight(s), you should have new brood in a couple of weeks. She can stay with the nuc or be caged to introduce into another hive. If she is removed, the nuc will be ready for another queen cell, or it can be combined with another colony.

Good grief!...after reading all that, you are probably ready for Plan B.

Well, if you just want a few queens, there is another option. A “walkaway split” is where you divide a colony and have the bees raise themselves a new queen. They will mature several queen cells and you can carefully remove a few of them to put in mating nucs. Another easy option is to use a special queen rearing box found in the bee supply catalogues. It is a regular deep hive body with entrances on all four sides and dividers to set up as many as four nucleus colonies. If each section gets bees, eggs or tiny larvae, and a frame of stores they will raise a queen. Hopefully, her colony will exhibit all of the desirable traits you were seeking!

## **January Meeting Notes**

80 members and guests signed in at our January meeting! Larry Hoehne tried to come up with a head count but he said it was like trying to count bees. He figured that there were about 98 in the room and we collected dues from 89 new and renewing members! Be sure to sign in at the meetings since it an important club record.

After social time, Daryl Scott opened our meeting with an invocation and led us in the Pledge of Allegiance. We expect volunteers to help with this role, but again we had no one willing to step up for this important part of our meeting.

Daryl welcomed quite a few first timers that are planning on getting bees in the spring. They are off to a good start and will enjoy the benefits of belonging to the Fort Bend Beekeepers, but he warned them: if you ask a dozen beekeepers a question, be prepared for at least 14 answers. Beekeeping is both an art and a science and there are lots of ways to accomplish our goals. One great benefit is the availability of club-owned equipment for assembling hives, extracting honey, recovering beeswax, etc.

For his January “fun facts” Daryl reported that honey bees are thought to have originated in Asia some 300,000 years ago. While

workers may live only six or eight weeks, the queen’s lifespan can be as long as five years. In its lifetime, a worker will fly a distance equal to 1 1/2 times around the earth while contributing 1/12 of a teaspoon of honey to the hive.

Nectar and pollen will soon be in very short supply. Be sure that your hives have adequate stores as they await spring. If necessary, feed 50-50 syrup and pollen patties or pollen substitute. Daryl also suggested that this is a good time to repair or replace equipment.

Secretary-Treasurer Jeff McMullan reviewed our 2016 finances that were included in our January newsletter. A significant highlight was 160 paid members at year end. Jeff also presented the inventory of property owned by the club. Jeff also reminded members of our efforts to work closely with the Fort Bend County Health & Human Services Department as they prepare for mosquito borne illnesses, especially the Zika virus. Hive locations can be registered at <https://surveymonkey.com/r/FBGCHHSApiaries>.

Jeff also informed the group of a theft in Brazoria County: 300 hives! The hives are branded “HHI”. Jeff reminded everyone that if hives are branded with a registration number issued by the Texas Apiary Inspection Service, they can be identified across the U.S.

Jeff also discussed parasitic mite syndrome and a management strategy that holds great promise. He has been helping a member who appears to have recently lost hives to pesticides, perhaps bedding plants treated with systemic pesticide. In their consultation with TAIS, inspector Mary Reed pointed out unrelated symptoms of varroa problems. Besides actually seeing mites in photos, she noted bees infected with K-wing virus, a disease transmitted by varroa. Mary’s sharp eye led Jeff to focus on a December, 2016 American Bee Journal article entitled “Your Bees Don’t Have To Die”. The suggested management

strategy is quite simple. Sample frequently for varroa. Infected hives should be treated for mites and requeened with bees proven to show resistance to these obnoxious pests! An important point is that “survival of the fittest” is a bad bee-keeping strategy because mites in failed colonies escape the hive on robbers, leading to more infested hives and more colony failures. In closing, Jeff presented a short video showing how to sample for mites.

Gene deBons announced a slate of officer nominations that have agreed to serve. The were seconded and, having no nominations from the floor, the candidates were elected unanimously. Our new officers for 2017 are:

Nancy Hentschel, President  
Tracey Grimme, Vice President  
Jeff McMullan, Secretary-Treasurer

Again we have run out of room to announce our door prize winners. Thanks to the donors and congratulations to the lucky winners.

## **Treasurer’s Report**

Our January treasury balance was \$2,373.82. We’ve collected dues from 89 new and renewing members (\$445.00) and received \$15.00 in donations. The resulting treasury balance is \$2,933.82, consisting of \$50.00 in cash for change and \$2,783.82 in our Wells Fargo checking account.

**TEXAS A&M  
AGRI LIFE  
EXTENSION**

*Boone Holladay*

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